

FEATURE

Walking a difficult road ...

# Single male Marines cope with parenting

LANCE CPL.  
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With more than 11.9 million single parents, 25 percent of America’s parenting community faces the difficult task of raising their child alone. Of that group, only one sixth of them are male, which is why modern day society is often surprised when men not only raise their children, but raise their children successfully.

“People get too excited seeing a male single parent when the ratio of male single parents to female single parents is outweighed one to six,” said Gunnery Sgt. Michael S. Ropp, Headquarters Co. gunnery sergeant and a single parent for three years, who has custody of his two children.

Ropp believes that single parenting is equally difficult for both men and women, and that the difference between success and failure can be decided by good time management and leaving work at work.

Ropp, who believes he has developed a good schedule where his work and his children are happy, struggled initially when he was faced with the new challenge of raising his children alone.

“Everything is much harder now that I do it by myself,” said Ropp, an Elmira, N.Y., native. “At first, [raising them alone] was a struggle, trying to stay up with their school activities and the extracurricular sports they participate in. Now, we have developed a schedule that we all can work with. By the time I’m off work, they are already dressed to go to whatever practice they have that day, so we spend less time trying to get ready and more time doing what they like.”

Ropp is one of many single male Marine parents stationed aboard the Depot.

Primary Marksmanship Instructor Sgt. Johnny Peebles, of Columbus, Ga., has been raising his 1-year-old son since birth. Separated from the mother of his child, Peebles is just beginning to experience the hardships of being a single parent.

The first few steps within the world of single parenting are often the most difficult, but you must walk before you can crawl.

Sergeant Stephen Gilmore, range coach, received custody of his 3-year-old daughter just after her birth. The Florence, S.C., native, said the hardest part of raising his daughter was when she was first born.

“She cried all the time during the night,” remembered Gilmore, who believes he too has adjusted to a different lifestyle.

Lack of sleep is often the most difficult aspect of raising an infant, and when there is no one there to take turns with you or suffer through the lack of sleep together, the late nights can get much later.

First Sgt. William Burton, Headquarters Co. first sergeant, has raised his three children with his wife, so he has not experienced single parenting first hand.

“I respect the way [Ropp] makes sure he has time to be with his kids,” said Burton, who has worked with Ropp for the last three months. “He is able to do what a lot of married parents do with their kids, but on his own.”

Separating their professional and personal lives can be difficult for many people, but many of the Depot’s single male Marines have adjusted admirably.

“Sometimes I work long days where I deal with recruits and I come home and I’m entirely worn out and my son wants to play,” Peebles said. “Even though I’m tired, I play with him. If I am ever too tired to take a couple minutes and play with him, that’s the point when I realize that I can not take work home.”



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**Gunnery Sgt. Michael Ropp, Headquarters Co. gunnery sergeant, stands by to watch his oldest son, Jacob, 13, help his little brother, Tyler, 6, put on a helmet before he goes out to play in a baseball game at the Laurel Bay softball fields Monday. Ropp finds the time to balance his Marine Corps career and a volunteer position as assistant team coach without losing time with his children. According to recent U.S. studies, more than 84 percent of children who live with one parent live with their mother.**

Headquarters Co. commander, Capt. Bradley Anderson, a married father of two, said he sympathizes with single fathering situations because he knows how difficult it can be.

“I told [Ropp] when he first came here to let me know if he needs the time off to deal with anything personal,” said Anderson. “I reassure him that I understand.”

New single parents often believe they face their new challenge alone, but within the Marine Corps community, support from friends and co-workers is never hard to find.

“I’ve had other Marines help me,” said

Ropp. “A Marine’s wife would come and check in on the boys each day after school when I wasn’t there.”

Peebles said some Marine spouses come over to watch his child so he may go shopping or take care of bills.

Having a child and being a single parent can sometimes conflict with working hours, but Peebles said his command allows him off of work early to take his son to appointments.

“I had to take off two months when he was born so that I could take care of him,” Peebles laughed. “My son is a picky eater. I had to take off because he wouldn’t let anyone feed him except for me.”

Other Marines also spoke of their office’s understanding and compassion.

“They completely understand my situation and they work with me,” Gilmore said.

Communication between single parents and their command is often crucial for single parents, but if done correctly, one’s command can often lighten the load tremendously.

You have to let your command know your situation, said Ropp. If something was to happen and they did not know your situation, they would not be able to help. Their support is appreciated and often necessary.